

# Compassion Fatigue in Library Staff





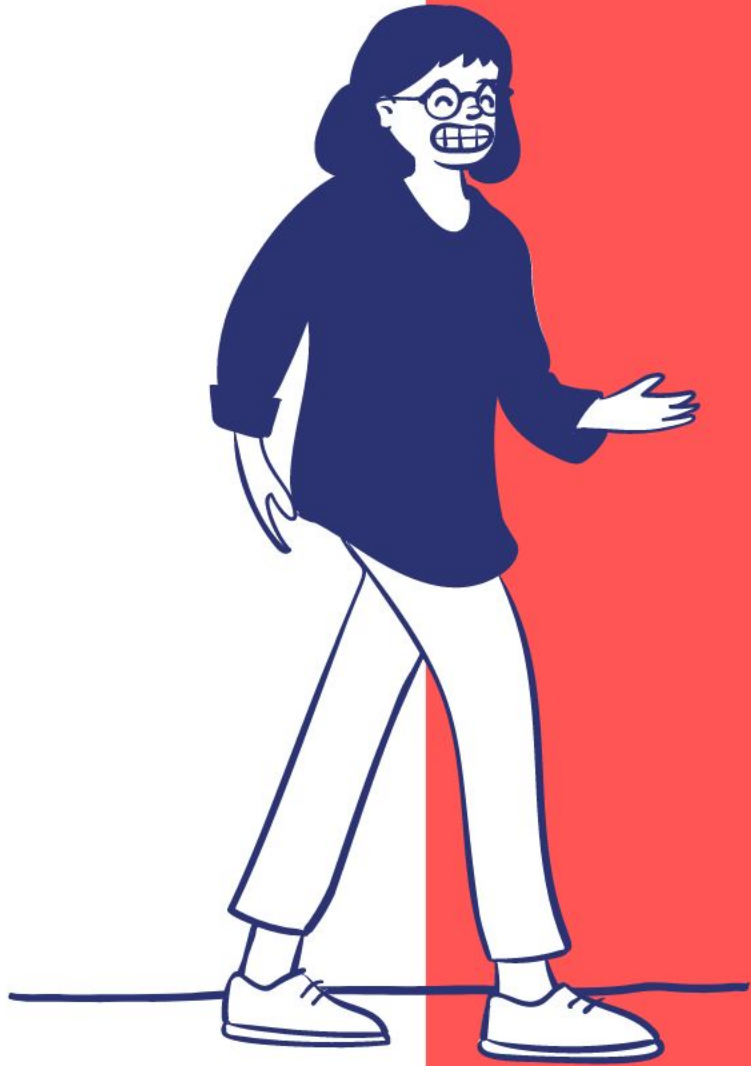
# What is compassion fatigue?

Also called “vicarious traumatization” or secondary traumatization (Figley, 1995). The emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events. It differs from burn-out, but can co-exist. Compassion Fatigue can occur due to exposure on one case or can be due to a “cumulative” level of trauma.

- The American Institute of Stress

“Compassion fatigue is basically draining of emotional energy for those of us who deal with others pain.”

- Walter Roberts, American Red Cross



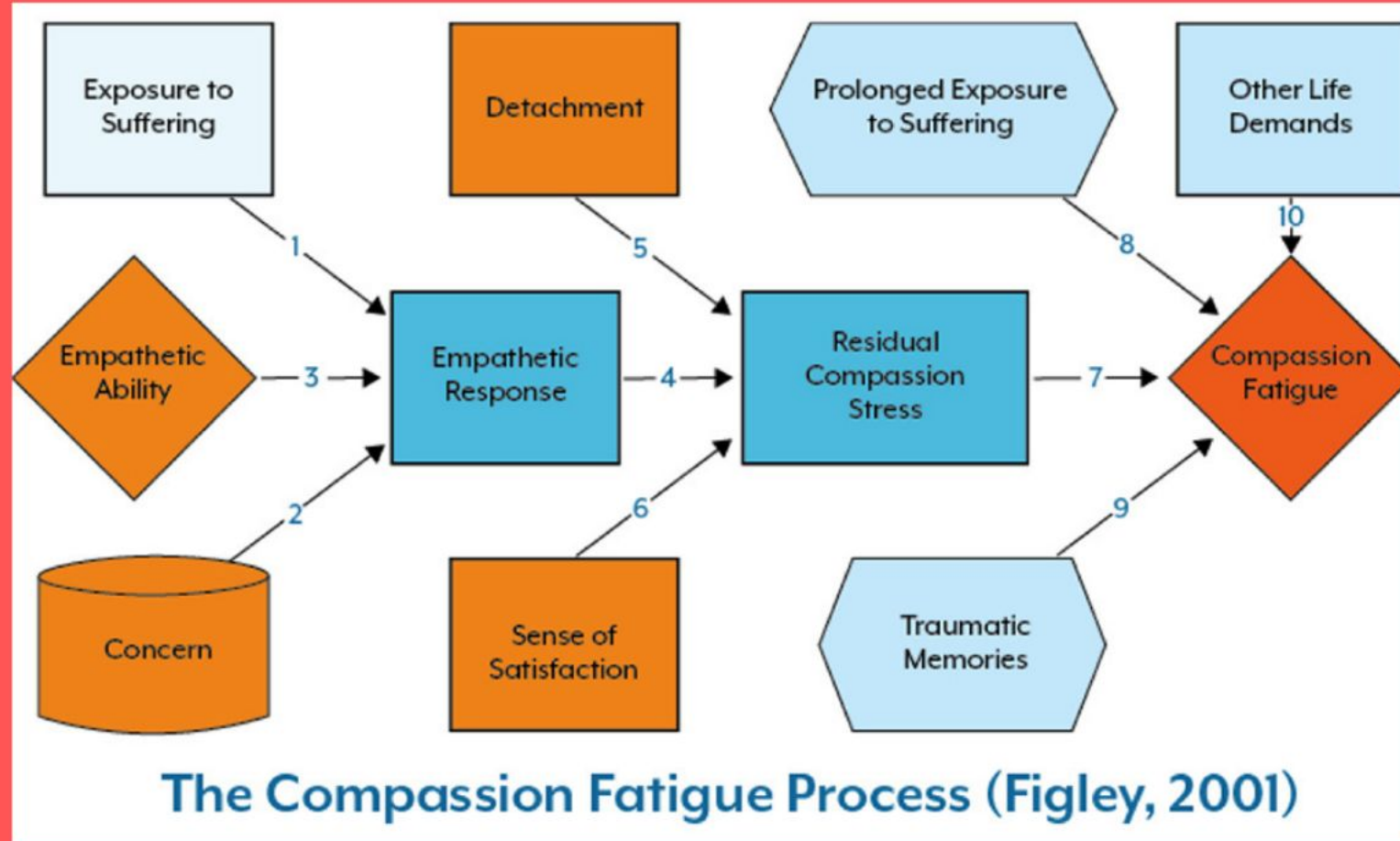
# Why do library staff suffer from compassion fatigue?

Library staff, particularly front-facing public library staff, assist the most vulnerable members of the public. This may include:

Patrons who are homeless,  
have uncontrolled or undercontrolled mental illness,  
have substance abuse issues,  
have a lack of resources,  
or some combination of these things.

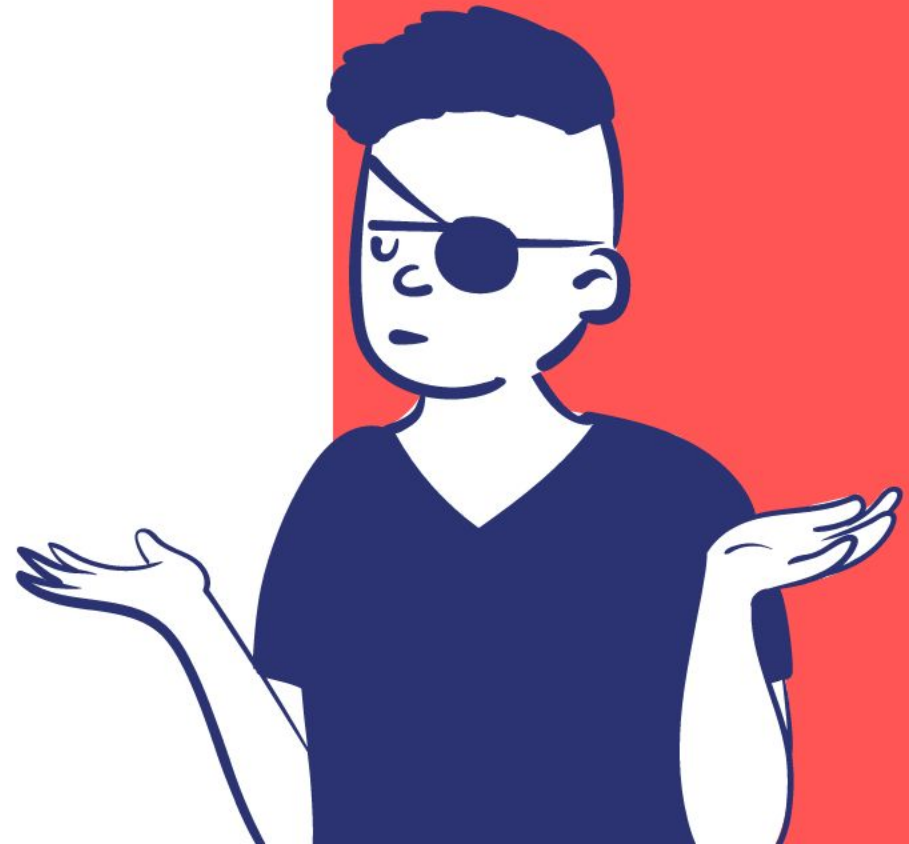
Assisting these patrons effectively requires that the library staff member do so with compassion. They also carry their own personal baggage into these interactions.

# The Compassion Fatigue Process



# What are symptoms of compassion fatigue?

- Feeling burdened by the suffering of others
- Blaming others for their suffering
- Isolating yourself
- Loss of pleasure in life
- Difficulty concentrating
- Insomnia
- Physical and mental fatigue
- Bottling up your emotions
- Increased nightmares
- Feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness
- Frequent complaining about your work or your life
- Overeating
- Excessive use of drugs or alcohol
- Poor self-care
- Beginning to receive a lot of complaints about your work or attitude
- Denial



# What impacts can compassion fatigue have?



01

A gradual desensitization to patron stories, a decrease in quality assistance, higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders among staff, and rising rates of stress leave and degradation in workplace climate.

02

Staff have found that their empathy and ability to connect with their loved ones and friends is impacted.

03

In turn, this can lead to increased rates of stress in the household, divorce, and social isolation.

# So, how do we deal with it?

Be aware of compassion fatigue and its symptoms and, if you're a supervisor, make staff aware.

Have an open door policy for employees who might be feeling overwhelmed.

Make information about your organization's EAP (or other resources) available.

Offer staff the opportunity to talk about mental health during check-ins.



# So, how do we deal with it?

Encourage a healthy work/life balance.

Acknowledge the successes of staff.

Foster an environment of optimism

Be available to help staff when they are dealing with patrons who require a large amount of empathy and compassion.





# Resources



American Institute of Stress  
<http://www.stress.org>

Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project  
<https://www.compassionfatigue.org/>

Psychology Today  
Are You Suffering from Compassion Fatigue?  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/high-octane-women/201407/are-you-suffering-compassion-fatigue>

[Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized](#), edited by Charles R. Figley, Ph.D.



# Contact Me!

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